

The Imperative of Recovering the Culture of Ohafia

Nkwande Igwehachikwa Omerali Ohafia

By

Professor Ezichi Anya Ituma
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
www.greatituma.blogspot.com

There is no concept that has been bastardized and disrespected in the Western Christian aborigine of Africa as the word, “African Culture.” In Western African Christianity, African culture denotes a monster from the pit of hell. But in Western World culture is the word of civilization and technological advancement. To many Christians in Nigeria, Western culture is synonymous with Christianity. But let us briefly get to the dictionary meaning of culture, then relate it to Ohafia. Culture is summarily the totality of a people’s way of life. Online dictionary defined it as “The arts, customs, lifestyles, background, and habits that characterize a particular society or nation.” It is expressed in “The beliefs, values, behavior and material objects that constitute a people’s way of life.” “A culture is the combination of the language that you speak and the geographical location you belong to. It also includes the way you represent dates, times and currencies.”

When the Scottish missionaries brought the Gospel to Ohafia in 1910 the people accepted it with their two hands. The Gospel was encapsulated in the western gab because the Whiteman had already adopted, internalized and inculturated the Gospel in his society. The Christian Gospel had become the culture of the Whiteman by then. What the Whiteman brought to African was the Gospel in Whiteman’s culture. Over time it became difficult to separate the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the Culture of the Whiteman. It is even becoming more difficult today because the Nigerians are now the one teaching the Whiteman his culture and as well as the Whiteman’s Christianity. It is Christian and heavenly for a Pastor to wear suit, without ever asking if Jesus ever wore suit? A typical village preacher is under intense anointing when he speaks to typical village women in English while an interpreter interprets the message in Central Igbo, or few occasions in Ohafia language. We sing the western hymns, wear their clothes and speak their language as if these are the dwelling of God. It is now Christian for Ohafia people to answer Julius, Patrick, Williams, Johnbosco, Damian, Martina, Patricia, Helen, Suzanna, etc. To the modern Ohafia man it is satanic to answer Kalu, Uduma, Ikpege, Olugu, Ejituru, etc.

Today I have come to tell you that God hears Ohafia language, blesses Ohafia food and supplies our water from the streams of Ohafia – uyim!

OHAFFIA CULTURE

Ohafia culture was shaped by the efforts of our forefathers to grapple with the world around them within the worldview they were born into. The way they related with one another was defined by the

Ohafia worldview. It was a worldview that respected truth, justice and love. You cannot tell lies before the traditional Priests, not even the Elders. Our language, our food, our songs, our lifestyle, respect for elders, speaking the truth, environmental sanitation (izaa Ogoo, izaa uzo iyi etc) are part of Ohafia culture, and were held sacred. Arts, music, literature, etc constitute our culture. *Anaga aduo Ezie aduo* because *Ezie* was families and lineages inherited these sacred stools. Even in moments of disagreement elders revisited sacred history and everyone saw the truth very clearly. Every decision taken at the *Achichi* Ohafia was very sacred and binding.

OHAFFIA NAMES

May I bring to our notice that there was no single Ohafia name that was negative. No person, however primitive, will give a negative name to his/her child. We have lost the meaning because the Whiteman told us that everything about our name is satanic and barbaric. Not only have we adopted Western names, there are Ohafia people now answering Olayinka (Yoruba), Ekene (Anambra), Emeka (Anambra) etc. But no Anambra man wants to answer Okali, Ukwa, Ugbu, Abali, Kalu, Ojo, etc. Names were sentences and phrases and not the modern truncated meaningless inglorious vocalization. Most of the ancient names are recovered today at the Ikoro, funerals, traditional dances, etc.

OHAFFIA LANGUAGE

There is no nation that has no language. The Jews speak Hebrew language but the Western missionary preferred to teach us English. The New Testament was written in Greek but the Western missionary preferred Latin and English. Ohafia language is rich with idiomatic expressions, actions and vocalization that give you clear understanding of what is required. While other Igbo groups are now discussing how to translate the Bible in their native tongue, Ohafia people are throwing their language to the dogs.

OHAFFIA DANCES

Ohafia dances were not mere body expressions and gesticulations but full of meaning in pride for heroic and legendary appreciation. *Ekpe* had the *atu* dance to showcase the heroic legendary of Ohafia Ancestor that subdued the most dangerous Buffalo that threatened the existence of the Ohafia people during the ancient times. *Iri agha* had the *akpuli* dance to mimic the muscle pull and contraction observed during Ohafia heroic wars. Every costume in the dances had symbolic theology and heroic expression.

AGE GRADE

This was the main hub of security and development among Ohafia people. Belonging to an age grade was not a choice but a lifestyle. One just belonged without any prejudice because nothing was possible without the age grade. Our security challenges today are the outcome of cultural negligence. We found ourselves in a world that was very capricious and war was constant for security purposes and safeguarding of life, property and boundaries. Ohafia people never engage in mercenary war. Ohafia man never shed the blood of fellow Ohafia. Safeguarding boundaries against infiltrators was a

universal practice and not peculiar to Ohafia. However, every Ohafia man was very courageous and always a hero.

VERY NOTABLE WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

There are some notable words and expressions that showcase the heroic indomitability of Ohafia man:

Shio – an expression that Ohafia man can no longer take the insults and embarrassments.

Oginidi – an expression that Ohafia man can no longer take the insults and embarrassments.

Igbule ochu – to shed Ohafia blood was *igbu ochu* and the land must be cleansed by *igwa ochu*. Life is sacred and must be preserved at all cost.

Ohafiaeeee! Onye meanyiwoooo!!! – expression that will see Ohafia man spill his last blood in defence of Ohafia identity!

Ikpa nbogo – excommunication of the evil people in the society

Today, the man from Ehem may not be very comfortable and relaxed in Eziafor, neither the man from Asaga feeling at home in Isugu, etc

Many notable atrocities are now being perpetrated with impunity and one wonders where the Ohafia character is, that spelt ingenuity, courage, hard work; and eschewed cowardice and laziness.

DEVELOPMENT OF OHAFIA

We will end up deceiving ourselves if we do not understand development from Ohafia perspective. Development is a very inclusive concept in Ohafia spelling out the ideology of *togetherness* and unity of purpose. You do not invite a kinsman to the table while eating because tradition demands that he is already invited by mere being present where food is set. It brings Ohafia to the forefront as against individualism. What we call *secret societies* today in our traditional setting were mere schools where the Ohafia boy or girl was educated and integrated into the society that gave him/her life; *obon* concept of confidentiality and *ekpe* courageous flog are examples.

It was Ohafia first and Ohafia last.

You are strong because we are strong;

You are, because we are!

Development includes mindset (indomitability), inculcation of virtue (*agbogo luzia diya yodi elege oji ogwu*), human resource maintenance, infrastructural modernization, economic recovery (*okpogo akpaikwu*), unity of purpose (*gidi wugwu eze*). Ohafia politician determines to develop Ohafia before his personal comfort because of Ohafia virtue. It is *aruu* and never heard of, that Ohafia man embezzled the fund or communal heritage.

OUR PROBLEM

The problem of Ohafia is a result of careless and ruthless destruction of ideologies due to ignorance, western mental subjugation, adulterated Nigerian Christianity and hermeneutics of anachronism in our eisegesis of the Holy Writ. We have lost everything to the Whiteman, including our language, food,

virtue, moral rectitude, our *ezi uka*. Western history taught us that Mungo Park discovered the Niger! The Whiteman discovered Africa! The Whiteman taught us the idea of God! So, the African was so brainless that he could not even discover himself. We have carried this mindset in our half education to criticize and castigate every Ohafia concept. Some of the Ohafia people no longer come home because they will be killed by a witch or demonized culture. Our fellow educated Ohafia man has told us that our idea of development is barbaric, satanic and wicked. We have been told that our Ancestors were very wicked, dubious, liars, killers, buried Whiteman alive (but no one tells you that the Whiteman drowned our people in the high sea during slavery and raped our women before their husbands and parents). Nobody has told you how in some parts of Ohafia, able bodied young men were massacred because they killed one oyibo man that raped our daughter, etc. Why must God love American that progresses in development while hating the Ohafia person that must break covenants and sever himself from the impious Ancestors in Community deliverance before being blessed by God? We need to research into our history and teach our people the positive history which includes why we did what we did in the past. That is the main way to get our children to love Ohafia and to come back home to develop Ohafia.

OUR SOLUTION

1. Set up a research committee to rediscover
 - a. the meaning of Ohafia names,
 - b. the meaning and symbolism of Ohafia dances;
 - c. the meaning of unity in ancient Ohafia;
 - d. the meaning of development in ancient Ohafia
 - e. the meaning and symbolic theology of Ohafia material and non-material culture.
2. Begin to encourage Ohafia who are living abroad to insist on Ohafia names;
3. Begin to encourage the use of Ohafia language in our homes and schools, without prejudice to English language used for teaching subjects;
4. Encourage every Ohafia child to be educated to tertiary level; adult education should be emphasized and encouraged in every Ohafia town; evening schools should be established; Churches and community leaders/Town Unions should be encouraged to establish these.

When we begin to publish our research findings in pamphlets, handy mimeographs and even Ohafia encyclopedia our educated sons and daughters will begin to see that Ohafia is a great nation. When we publish and accept our rich heritage we may then constitute a standing mobilization team to drive home the concepts of Ohafia among various Ohafai town Unions.

I can see a revival and I wish you join me to see the good things of Ohafia which outweighs our wrongs.

Thank you.